

**Mothers' becoming teachers.  
What motivates them? What doesn't?**

by

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# **Mothers' becoming teachers. What motivates them? What doesn't?**

## **Abstract**

This research draws on six interviews with mothers with dependent children who are studying to become primary school teachers in New Zealand. It investigates the motivating factors that encouraged them to undertake such tertiary studies and also introduces the implications for their families. For these six women, the role of mother seemed intrinsically tied to their motivation to train as teachers. Considerations relating to mothering (in part) also influenced when they began studying towards this career and influenced how they felt about these decisions and managed their study once at the College. However, the pressures of organising their own children before and after school, spending more time away from the home, and relying on the support of other people to care for their children added to their feelings of stress and guilt. Those of us engaged in tertiary provision need to seriously consider the issues around motivation evident in the women's comments and what we can do to address them and thus provide inclusive education for this group. Students who are parents, and, it seems, especially those who are mothers, need to know that their tertiary study is of value to them and their families, and that the environment they are learning in supports their specific needs.

## **Mothers becoming teachers**

### **What motivates them? What doesn't?**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, New Zealand, like other countries, has experienced a gender transition in tertiary educational enrolment and attainment, with women participating in tertiary education at a significantly higher rate than men. In New Zealand in 2000, there were just over 41, 000 more women enrolled than men, but in 2004 this had increased to just over 75,000, making the total number of women enrolled in tertiary education in New Zealand 294,439 in 2004 (Callister, Newell, Perry, & Scott, 2006). In Britain, there has been an enormous expansion over the last decade in terms of groups entering higher education who may not have previously considered working towards a tertiary qualification (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001).

The increase in the number of women in tertiary education corresponds with an increased number of women in teacher training. The pattern of more women entering pre-service teacher education has been a trend evident in society for some time, and predates the overall pattern of more women than men in tertiary education. Overall, in 2004 in New Zealand, there were 3.7 times as many women as men enrolled in teacher training, a figure that reflects a pattern of more female than male teachers in early childhood

education and care, primary schools and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2006). This trend is also associated with a changing demographic for the women who are enrolling in terms of age (more women in older age brackets rather than primarily traditional school-leavers), life experiences (broader), employment histories (experience in one or more spheres of work) and domestic status (partnered or previously partnered) (see Callister et al., 2006). The profile of students entering pre-service teacher education over the last 10 years not surprisingly reflects these changes, particularly in the shift from a student body made up primarily of people just out of or recently out of school towards one of mature-age students, with an approximate age range of 21 to 50. Within this shift sits a group of mature-age female students who are also mothers caring for dependent children.

### **Mothers of Dependent Children**

It is important to note that while these women have this aspect of their lives in common, their age range and concomitant breadth of life and employment experiences means that they too must be viewed as a diverse group, a factor that needs to be considered in relation to the commentary in this article. The definition of a typical mother of dependent children is also difficult to determine. Within any group of such women will be individuals of different ages and social and ethnic backgrounds. There will be mothers who may be partnered or single and who live within families that may be well resourced or struggling. This consideration again illustrates the complexity within this non-

homogenous group and serves to remind us of what the actual definition of a typical tertiary student should be today.

The motivation for women who are mothers to take up tertiary study at a stage in their lives when they are also likely to be involved in a career path and have responsibilities like a mortgage varies (Baxter & Britton, 1997; Blaxter & Tight, 1994; Merrill, 1996; Neale, 2001). Understanding what drives women who are also mothers to enter tertiary education, and to remain motivated while there, is important for developing a tertiary environment that welcomes diversity and so helps ensure academic success (Jarvis, 2001).

Because these women as a group are becoming increasingly represented in tertiary education and teacher education (Callister et al., 2006), it is important to accommodate their needs in both education and the workforce in order to recruit and retrain them. For these women, time in tertiary education tends to be marked by a particularly strong conflict between the responsibilities of personal and academic lives (Griffiths, 2002; Merrill, 1999; Wilson, 1997).

Mothers who are also students offer opportunity to add to knowledge of what motivates women to take up tertiary study after having children, and to remain motivated once there.

This research draws on six interviews with mothers who are studying full time on campus to become primary school teachers in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> But before reporting what these mothers said motivated them to become teachers and

what they considered was now influencing their degree of motivation, it is important to discuss the changing valuation of women's traditional roles in society.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Women and work**

Feminist theory generally refers to our society in terms of the systematic structural differences that exist between the cultural, economic and social positions of men and women (see, for example, Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirkby, 2003). This gendered difference traditionally (and to a considerable extent still does) places the responsibility for childcare and the domestic spheres firmly on the shoulders of women. Women therefore are likely to face a more difficult time than men in meeting and reconciling the demands of their family, paid employment and/or study (Stanley-Clarke, 2000).

Increased female participation in the paid workforce (Department of Statistics, 2006) and as students in tertiary institutions (Callister et al., 2006) over the years has seen little parallel diminution in family and household responsibilities (O'Connell, 2005; Stanley-Clarke, 2000; Thompson, 2000). The expansion of socially acceptable roles for women in the paid workforce has come 'largely through adding on new responsibilities and possibilities to

those already assigned to them, rather than through structural changes in social institutions or interpersonal relationships' (O'Connell, 2005). George and Maguire (1998) suggest that mothers cannot meet their 'public world obligations' without being accused of neglecting their duties in the private domain. Neale (2001) writes of the complexity of women's lives in terms of women having little opportunity to focus solely on one aspect of their lives to the exclusion of others, which can make their return to study problematic.

Society may state it values motherhood and women staying at home to care for their children, but at present the economic or social incentives for women to do this work rarely compare with those gained from paid employment (Stanley-Clarke, 2000). Labour market participation statistics for New Zealand show that many women remain at home while their children are young (Ministry of Women's Affairs, cited in Stanley-Clarke, 2000), but return to paid work, either full or part time soon after. This situation indicates a need for financial gain that cannot be obtained from staying at home and caring for children. Another possible indication of these expectations is the high concentration of women relative to men working in industries that tend to offer more part-time paid employment. According to the 2006 New Zealand Census, for example, 63% of those working in the accommodation, cafe and restaurant industry were women, and 65% of those working in service and sales occupations were women (Department of Statistics, 2006).

Stanley-Clarke (2000) points out that it is the traditional, gendered role of women as mothers, and hence primary caregivers, that offer women the option of remaining at home to care for their children. It could be said that this also perpetuates the myth that women are 'best' with young children and that primary teaching is just an extension of mothering. According to Stanley-Clarke (2000), mothers do not find the decision to return to the paid workforce or to study (and sometimes both simultaneously) easy, as they need to weigh up the needs of the family with their own personal and economic requirements. She reports that some mothers experience full-time motherhood as engendering deep feelings of satisfaction, self-worth and self-esteem, while others characterise it as a time of economic dependence, loneliness, isolation and lack of identity.

Debates around the erosion of social capital due to changes in family life can also be mentioned here. Social capital, a concept used mainly by sociologists and other researchers working on social equity, poverty, civil engagement and similar issues, refers to a social group's potential to achieve mutual benefits through cooperative means (Edwards, 2002). Within the context of Edward's discussion, we can ask if women's increased participation in the labour market contributes to the weakening of social capital in contemporary society or if new social capital is being developed in a new social context by people building alternative forms of social networks, identifying with each other, and developing trust and reciprocity. Edwards considers that by increasing their



labour market participation, women are contributing to diversity within the roles held within a family and to diversity of family forms, a situation that may be providing the basis for a new form of social capital (Edwards, 2002).

### **Motivation**

As the dilemmas for mothers navigating both family life and paid-employment/student life become evident, we are compelled to ask, if it is that stressful, why do they bother? And they do bother, as Thompson (2000) documents in her extensive examination of women and educational opportunity. In regard to a return to study, Parr (2000) and White (2004) found that mature women rationalize their return to study at two levels. On one level, it is to get qualifications and a better job and to contribute to the family income. On another level, it is for status, esteem and the need to prove ability. Often, the imperatives relate simply to the need to increase skills in order to procure work and so earn a living (particularly evident among women in sole-parenting positions). In New Zealand, women are more likely than men to receive income from the domestic purposes benefit—a means-tested monetary amount from the government to assist those who are solo parents (Department of Statistics, 2006). Reliance on this benefit, generally perceived to be of a subsistence level of support, and the stigma still associated with receipt of such a benefit, suggest that women are more likely then to try and gain skills and qualifications to lessen their dependency on such government support. In his examination of what motivates adults to engage in further

education, West (1995) found the driver can be a significant person in their lives (partner, friend, relative, teacher), who motivates them to explore further educational and career options. He suggests that these people are often instrumental in supporting mature students to tell ‘new stories’ and ‘construct a more authentic self’ in the process (p. 133).

## **METHOD**

I invited six mothers enrolled in primary teacher training at a New Zealand College of Education to take part in this research. I knew that each of them had a dependent child or children and would be available, due to their course selections, to participate during the proposed data collection period. These women were all white and middle class, with three in their second year of training and three in their third and final year. Table 1 introduces the women (their names are pseudonyms) and their children.

[Take in Table 1 about here]

My interviews with the women followed the ‘feminist sociology norm’—in-depth, semi-structured interviews in an environment where the subjects felt safe and positive (Duncan & Edwards, 1999). The interviews were each about an hour long and asked the women to provide demographic detail, such as

numbers and ages of children. The questionnaire also asked the women to describe the events and motivation that led to their decisions to become primary teachers, the effects on their children, their wider family and their financial status, and how being a student had affected their personal relationships with their partners and friends. I also asked what they thought the College could do to make it easier for them and their families, while they were studying at it. I sought, with these questions, and through prompts and pursuits, to discover their beliefs, attitudes and motivations.

I audio-taped the interviews and then transcribed them in order to conduct a detailed narrative analysis. A process of grounded interview analysis (Duncan, 2000) was used to analyse the data. Limitations in terms of using semi-structured interviews are that these access information at the individual level rather than both the individual and the collective level, there is potential for the respondent to reply in terms of a discourse she feels is expected, and the process is weak in accessing general patterns (Duncan, 2000). Ways to compensate for these weaknesses could be the addition of a focus group so as to access dominant discourse in terms of a group discussion around the issues, and interpretive biography, in order to access individual belief systems and determine how these have emerged in relation to the respondent's social contexts and experiences (Duncan, 2000).

The small sample size of this study may be questioned in terms of whether the data gathered from six women can be validly used to represent an understanding of the experience of other mothers who are also student-teachers. As with Duncan and Edwards' 'lone mothers project' (1999), this small group design can be justified by reference to Sayer's (1992) realistic account of explanation in social science, where intensive work of this type is posited as superior in accessing social process and in establishing social cause. Also, the complexity within the demographic of the small group (three sole parents, two married, one living with her partner, three aged 40 and over, three in their 20s) and their individual circumstances brought a particular richness to the data in similar vein to the group of women at the heart of a study by Maguire (2001). Her investigation, which focused on seven women in a specified older age bracket who taught teachers, drew on refreshing ideas and references to validate the insights that such research can give, and suggests small numbers can still be likely to reflect the worlds of the people represented by the research participants.

## **ETHICAL ISSUES**

As a woman researcher known to the students as a both a lecturer and a mother, my position was open and transparent. The commonalities I shared with these women by virtue of our gender seemed to enable the participants to willingly and eagerly share their stories. Throughout the research process, I endeavoured to acknowledge and protect the rights, interests, and sensitivities

of the participants at all times. When analysing the data, I used only the pseudonyms of the participants, and I destroyed my drafts of information three months after completing the research. This project gained approval from the ethics committee of the institution.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings demonstrate both personal and vocational motives for the participants' decisions to study towards becoming primary school teachers. The women's responses, although complex and very personal to their own circumstances, have been grouped together where necessary and appropriate to fit the confines of the journal word length.

### **What Motivated Them to Return to Study?**

The six women all said they decided to return to study once they considered the timing was right for them and their families. This was of course quite different for each of the women in terms of their financial situations, the ages of their children and their confidence to engage in full-time study. These mothers wanted to improve their employment and financial prospects, 'to improve themselves', and to enhance their self-esteem. As Rachel (aged 40, three children) said, she 'wanted to be more than just "Mum"'. The two older participants (Rachel and Justine) had husbands and older children, and were

particularly motivated by doing something worthwhile for themselves—to move beyond the boundaries of their domestic roles. The experiences of these two women were very similar. They had worked when they first got married, then had their families, and had been mothers and wives ever since. They both felt it was ‘their time’ now and were inspired to become teachers, although both expressed nervousness about the prospect. They acknowledged they were placing stresses on their families, but said the desire and commitment to succeed in a field of employment was stronger. The attitude in their stories is one of a desire for personal development.

*Rachel (aged 40, three children):* I had some odd jobs while the children were growing up but really supported my husband in his career. His job involved a lot of hours so it meant that if I wanted to work more, I would have had to put the children into full-time care and only see them at night when I would be really tired, so by waiting until they were a lot older made sense for the whole family and gave me something of my own to do when the children are older.

*Justine (aged 49, four children):* I thought about applying for College, to prove something to myself that I could do something worthwhile, and I found the Teacher Aid Course quite easy, and being successful in that gave me huge confidence in myself and my abilities. Also, the time was more suitable too, as my youngest son was at school, and I could get the older children to help out a bit with caring for him when I wasn’t home. I really wanted to have a good career again.

Baxter and Britton (1999) suggest from their findings on self-identity among mature-age students that women, more so than men, come to realize (a

‘revelation’ as the authors put it) that they need to change the pattern of their lives. The women in the present study expressed the same need to take control over their future prospects, but all qualified it by saying they had only endeavoured to do so once they felt they could satisfactorily balance study and eventual employment with family obligations.

### **What Motivated Them to Choose Teaching?**

The women’s decisions to return to study appeared to stem from an earlier desire to become primary school teachers and from the realisation that teaching would allow them to accommodate their family obligations. Five of the six participants had all thought about being a teacher before having families. Justine (aged 49, four children) said that she became interested while at high school in the possibility of becoming a primary school teacher. She said positive experiences during her schooling and with her teachers had fostered this desire. Kaye (aged 28, one child) said that she had struggled over the years to find a job that would fit in with her role as a mother, and had kept returning to the notion that primary school teaching was the best option in this regard. Rachel (aged 40, three children) and Hayley (aged 42, three children) admitted they had wanted to be teachers from an early age, but that ‘life had somehow got in the way’. Rachel felt she could not enter teaching until her children had ‘grown up’ and Hayley was inspired through working informally with a special needs child.

The women's comments showed that all six saw teaching as a career choice that fitted around their roles as mothers. Primary school teaching, they said, provided hours, holidays, and the type of satisfying work that would allow them to be at home for their children and husbands/partners. They also acknowledged the demands of the job through their varied experiences of between two to four teaching practices, but were still motivated by wanting a decent salary and good working conditions for themselves and their families.

The three participants who were solo mothers were particularly clear on wanting to find a career that would allow them to spend time with their children while studying towards to it, and then when working full time in the future. They all cited the appeal of the school holidays, and although limited and individualistic as these reasons may sound, this was their reality at this stage of their lives and what they felt would work best for them and their children.

*Kaye (aged 28, one child):* My main reason for pursuing it again is because of my daughter, and with being a single parent, I feel it would be a good career to fit in with having children as far as the family situation goes.

*Alice (aged 22, one child):* Teaching works in better when you have a child— you can have holidays off with them most of the time; you're not doing shift work and it's better pay.



Pam (aged 27, two children) also talked from the perspective of a solo parent, as at the time of first entering College she was on her own with her two children, but had subsequently reunited with her partner. She, too, had elected teaching because of the need to consider her children's welfare.

The six women all commented that their roles as mothers—their experience with their own children and their schooling—had also informed their choice to enter teaching. Parenting, they said, had given them the knowledge, experience and confidence to pursue this career, and had helped them overcome, to some degree, their nervousness over returning to study. They seemed to have come to the realisation that, as mothers, they had something to offer in a classroom. For the five women who had considered teaching before having a family, their mothering selves appeared to have rekindled that earlier desire.

*Justine (aged 49, four children):* The school kept asking me back and then offered me a job as a teacher aide, which I did for two years and then completed a Course in Teacher Aiding, but it just seemed to be an awful lot of work for such a small amount of pay.

*Pam (aged 27, two children):* My good friends really encouraged me by telling me that 'I would be a great primary school teacher', which I admit I had been thinking about for ages. They helped me put the application together and pushed me into sending it in

Malmgren and Weiner (2001) suggest that women make positive work-choices when they decide to enter the teaching profession, in terms of using

their experiences and knowledge as something positive and productive for schools. The two researchers maintain that women recognize that what they have to offer is something schools need and can gain advantage from.

### **What Motivates Them to Keep on Studying?**

Kantanis's (2002) findings that mature-age students return to study because of a desire for self-improvement and/or a genuine interest in a particular discipline ties in with the motivators for the participants in my study. Kantanis also found that, irrespective of motivation, the personal investment for mature-age students in deciding to return to study is high. However, this motivation was often undermined by apprehension about ability to study arising out of personal and academic inadequacies (perceived or real). While the comments of the participants in my study supported Kantanis's work, they also showed that the women's long-held desire to be teachers, experience as mothers and desire to succeed helped overcome any self-perceived inadequacies. They saw their experience as mothers, in particular, tallying with the requirements of teaching, and this perception gave them the conviction that they could succeed in this career. This conviction seemed to fuel their confidence as student-teachers.

That the women's motivation for pursuing a career in teaching focused in part on their perception it would allow them to 'work around' family needs indicates a possible close interconnection between how mothers' study/work-

related choices are influenced by their responsibilities to family and of the domestic sphere. Despite being motivated by the conviction that they had made a good choice in terms of study and (from there) career, all six reported tensions between their study and home lives that caused them to ask if they were, indeed, 'doing the right thing'. Guilt was a common theme, and was typically expressed in relation to their children's feelings, child care, added financial strain on the family, lack of time for their partners, children, wider family and even friends, and changes in the family dynamics and domestic roles. All found the struggle to manage and reconcile their two lives stressful and fatiguing, and said it limited their energy for study.

The mothers in this study reported that their children generally wanted to spend more time with them when they were at home. This was especially so for those children whose mothers had always been at home in the past, and for the mothers of the younger children. The mothers said they felt guilty about not being there when their children needed them and not being so available with their time, even when they were home. Two of the participants, Rachel (aged 40, three children) and Justine (aged 49, four children) said their older children did not like it when their mother was not at home to carry out tasks associated with women's traditional home-based role. They were upset if their mother was not home when they got home from school and if she was unable to take them out, help with their homework, listen to their stories, and feed them.

*Rachel (aged 40, three children):* He [son] equates me not being at home with not loving him. He is quite aloof and talks about me not loving them enough anymore to want to be there for them. I found this particularly difficult and filled me with huge guilt as he struggled to come to terms with the change in the family dynamics.

*Justine (aged 49, four children):* Now when they need help with things, I can't always help because I am studying or trying to get assignments done. Being able to accept that it was all right to spend time studying, instead of always being available for my children, is difficult. As I am the parent in the family who does help with the homework, I feel at times as if I am abandoning my children and putting myself first—not something I had really done before.

The mothers of the younger children said their children appeared to be 'clingier' and 'needier' at times than previously. They said their children really seemed to miss their mothers not being home and not being with them so much. The mothers reported a greater demand for their time when they were at home and certain behaviours, such as the child or children wanting to sleep in the mother's bed (Kaye, aged 28, one child) and clinging to her when left at preschool (Alice, aged 22, one child). Kaye said such behaviour indicated her child was having difficulty adjusting to the change in her mother's life.

The mothers with husbands and partners reported similar adjustment difficulties on the part of the men. They reported that these men did offer support to varying degrees, but that the type of support needed, such as doing

domestic chores, was promoted and negotiated with the man rather than the man freely providing it.

*Justine (aged 49, four children):* He will help if I ask him, but doesn't seem to see what needs to be doing while I am tearing my hair out!

The change in the family dynamics for those who had husbands or a partner also seemed to have an effect on the children, who now had their fathers taking on some of the previously 'mother-dominated' roles. Children, often unintentionally, contribute to the creation of an unsupportive home environment by complaining about the amount of time that study consumes for the mature-age student/parent (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992).

Again, the women's experiences find resonance in the literature. Kantanis (2002), Merrill, (1999) and Neale (2001) found that the return to study by the mature-age women students who participated in their research generated mixed reactions from family members, both immediate and extended. The reactions ranged from approval to disapproval and included encouragement, envy, resentment and mockery.

One reaction that was surprising, and therefore motivating, for these women in relation to the reaction of family members was that, despite having reservations, their children expressed pride and interest in their mother returning to study.

*Rachel (aged 40, three children):* He loves coming to the classroom I am teaching in to see what I am doing and comparing it with his classroom.

*Alice (aged 22, one child):* She thinks we are learning together, which ... [she thinks] is cool.

Affordable, accessible and reliable child care was another strong theme in the women's comments. All had issues in relation to child care. For example, two of the students, Alice (aged 22, one child) and Kaye (aged 28, one child), relied heavily on their own parents to assist them with child care at times, and both said they found it difficult asking their parents to make sacrifices so that their daughters could study.

*Kaye (aged 28, one child):* My parents have had to do a lot of helping me with her, but they have had to give up some of their own things so that they can be there after school.

Alice also relied on her parents to provide child care all day Saturday while she worked in her part-time job. Alice's need to earn money on top of her study and child care responsibilities is another layer of responsibility and potential stress commonly experienced by mature-age students with dependent children (Arskey, Marchant, & Simmill, 1994; Blaxter & Tight, 1994).

For these mothers, difficulties related to child care were particularly evident when their children were ill and when they had to go on professional practice.

While two students said they had brought sick children to College classes with them with the pre-arrangement and support of the lecturers concerned, they all said that they had experienced and felt the need to stay at home with their sick children, even if it meant getting behind in their work or missing classes. They said they felt particularly guilty if they came to College having sent unwell children off to school or arranged for other people to look after them. Participating on professional teaching practices engendered the same concerns. The three women with husbands and partners said it always fell on them to find others to care for their sick children or when they were on professional practice, or to be the one who stayed at home.

*Rachel (aged 40, three children):* He expects me to deal with the kids just as much as I used to. If they need someone, it has to be me, as his business has to come first.

These feelings of carrying the double burden of study/work and child care create considerable feelings of guilt and anxiety for mothers (Stanley-Clarke, 2000), and must surely limit their motivation to keep studying or stay in the workforce. A third of 841 first- and second-year teachers surveyed by the New Zealand University Students Association had dependent children, and 51% percent of them claimed that their student debt influenced their ability to provide child care for their children (O'Connell, 2005). It seems reasonable to suggest that because women have traditionally accepted the primary

responsibility for caring for their children, it is they who assume the role of locating child care when required.

It could be suggested that the above are female-oriented feelings and circumstances, and that the reactions from children and significant other family members relate to the mother moving out of her traditional role at home and into something unexpected and alien to the children as they knew her (see, for example, Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). It might also be suggested that the mothers' male counterparts—those who are fathers and students—do not encounter those same feelings of guilt, as they do not have to juggle their roles as fathers and students to the same degree or even take the time to consider the feelings of everyone around them when they decide to become full-time students. Work by Thompson (2000) provides support for this notion. Further research directed at comparing what motivates/de-motivates fathers who are students with what motivates/de-motivates mothers who are students could provide further valuable information pertinent to this aspect of gender debate.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the six women who participated in this study, the role of mother seemed intrinsically tied to their motivation to train as teachers. Considerations relating to mothering (in part) motivated their decision to choose teaching,



influenced when they began studying towards this career, and influenced how they felt about these decisions and managed their study once at the College.

The pressures of organising their own children before and after school, spending more time away from the home, and relying on the support of other people to care for their children added to their feelings of stress and guilt

Although motherhood is often dealt with in relation to the women's role in caring for children, this small study supports the notion that motherhood is so much more complex than that, and even more so when it intersects with the mother's desire to move beyond the role of mother/wife/partner and into the roles of student and/or employee. Whether or not mothers with dependent children take on these extra responsibilities, the literature, our own and anecdotal evidence tells us that these women tend to take the primary role within the family in several key respects. These include understanding and dealing with their children's feelings as the family's circumstances change, taking primary responsible for the domestic chores and responsibilities around the home, caring for their children as they grow and go through different stages, and be involved with their children's schooling, friends and extra-curricular activities.

If the women do not have a partner or other regular support from an adult, then everything to do with their children becomes their dedicated responsibility. If they have a partner, it seems they must also factor the

partner's needs/roles/responsibilities into the decision they make regarding study and paid employment. It is not surprising then that the choices mothers with dependent children make in regard to study and career are seemingly motivated by when and what is feasible in relation to their home-based roles.

So where does this lead us? In an era where attracting mature-age students to tertiary study and retaining them is important, those of us engaged in tertiary provision need to seriously consider the issues around motivation evident in the women's comments and what we can do to address them. Students who are parents, and, it seems, especially those who are mothers, need to know that their tertiary study is of value to them and their families, and that the environment they are learning in supports their specific needs.

To move forward, we need to think of more innovative and creative ways of providing tangible and concrete support for parent-learners. As illustration, there are several possible steps the College could take to support students with dependent children. One could be a properly resourced space and support person for these students. Mothers (and fathers if applicable) need a space where they can bring their children after school and in the weekends when they need short-term care while they visit the library and computer suites. This space should offer toys, a changing facility, and even fellow students available who might care for a child for a short time.

Being placed on teaching practice close to home or children's own schools would also probably be deemed helpful by the students, as would being placed with supervising teachers who are parents and understand the demands this role brings. Timetabling courses to coincide to the greatest extent possible with preschool and school hours is another possibility. However, these ideas would have to consider possible tensions with other students who may have to travel further or participate in teaching practices in more difficult schools. The complexities of meeting all of the needs of all of the students in any tertiary institution are difficult. Social justice issues and inclusion policies that target one group such as mothers can include and exclude simultaneously, as George and Maguire (1998) identify in documenting conflict between students with children and those without. However, for students who are mothers, this present research shows that any support offered should serve to lessen the guilt and fatigue that undercuts their motivation to take up study, to continue successfully in it, and to add their skills, knowledge and social capital to the workforce of the 21st century.

#### **NOTE**

- <sup>1.</sup> Primary teacher training in New Zealand usually involves work towards a three-year degree unless the student is already a graduate, in which case the period of pre-service teacher education is usually 18 months. Teacher training in New Zealand is undertaken by a number of providers, both private and state. Each provides a range of teaching qualifications that have to be accredited through a national qualifications association. At the institution where this research was carried out, the undergraduate students take part in six teaching practices over the

three years, comprising a three-week block and a four-week block in their first year, to two blocks of five weeks each in their second and third years. This degree can be completed full time or part time and either by on -campus delivery or distance delivery.

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**Table 1: Ages, number of dependent children and domestic status of participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Stage of degree</b>	<b>Number of children and ages</b>	<b>Domestic status</b>
Alice	22	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	One child, 2 years	solo parent
Pam	27	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Two children, 3 & 5 years	living with partner
Hayley	42	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Three children, 9, 14 & 16 years	solo parent
Kaye	28	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	One child, 3 years	solo parent
Rachel	40	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Three children, 7, 14, & 18 years	married
Justine	49	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Four children, 9, 16, 20 & 22 years	married